

CHRISTIANS AND SECULAR MUSIC

April 17, 2002 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) –

The following two articles form a little debate on the subject of Christians and secular music. The first is by a CCM lover, Mike Janke, which was published on Christian Music Central's web site. The capable and important reply to Janke is by our friend Brian Snider of Birmingham, Alabama.

CHRISTIANS CAN LISTEN TO SECULAR MUSIC

03/28/02 by Mike Janke

You can learn a lot from secular music.

I used to never listen to music that wasn't considered "Christian." That, however, is no longer the case. There are many reasons why, but one of the biggest is my firm belief that truth and worthwhile knowledge is not garnered solely from Christian sources.

If we stop and think we can see immediately how obvious this is. Consider all of the sources of knowledge that you have in your life. Teachers, friends, guest lecturers, co-workers, your boss, classic literature, popular fiction, the newspaper, plays, television dramas, documentaries, The Discovery Channel, the encyclopedia, etc. Now stop and calculate how many of these sources are actually "Christian." Maybe some of your teachers were Christians, or perhaps Christians made some of the films you have viewed. But in reality the chances are that the majority of these sources are more secular in nature. But is that really a bad thing?

There are obviously exceptions, where non-Christian sources are a negative: a science teacher who demands his students to accept macroevolution as a fact or a television show where immoral activity is glamorized and condoned by the behavior of its cast members. However those exceptions (no matter how numerous) do not disqualify the numerous positive sources of knowledge that are there. Does it really matter if your math teacher believes in God? Will integers and the order of operations be any different either way? Likewise, do the timeless lessons of Shakespeare or Herman Melville become any less influential and important when you consider that the men were not Christians? William the Conqueror crossed the English Channel in 1066 no matter what the religious status of my history teacher. And the powerful message of Schindler's List is decreased in no way by the fact that Steven Spielberg is a Jew (and not a Messianic one).

Clearly there is much that can be learned from sources outside of the "Christian" umbrella. Our choices in books, movies, and television alone are a firm testament to this. So why is it that so many in the church have determined that music is an exception to the rule?

While a non-Christian musician may not be able to speak in an informed manner on all things Biblical, he or she certainly can speak personally and intelligently about a great many other subjects. Musicians in the past have given their listeners lessons on beauty, love, friendship, trust, endurance, perseverance, honesty, patriotism, the importance of being yourself, and compassion. Music has historically served as a vehicle for storytelling -- folk and rap being the two most prominent forms -- which gives its listeners lessons in history, commentaries on injustice, and snapshots of society.

One of the greatest aspects of music is that it is also a window into the soul of the artist, and the listener, helping us to better understand personal suffering, disillusionment, pain, despair, loneliness, and fear. Pink's "Don't Let Me Get Me" is a great example of a current song that does this very thing. There's a reason why this song has become so popular so quickly -- a whole lot of people relate to it in a very strong way. Understanding why (the condition of a person) is the first step towards being able to approach them effectively with the Gospel.

Like the other sources of knowledge there is much that fails to inform in a positive manner, but that does not disqualify that which rises up and does otherwise. In life some of us have found the Truth. But of those who have not, some are much closer to the Truth than others. And, depending on the subject, any of these people can teach us at least a small amount of something. It's true that in some ways it can be hard to sort out the positive music from the negative, and many will not wish to even bother with the process. That is a personal choice you have to make. But even if you choose not to make that decision do not allow yourself to dismiss "secular" music on the whole as being utterly void of anything good. Because that is just not true.

Obviously a non-Christian source is not likely to point one towards God in a quest for salvation. But there is more to life than salvation, and most of us have moved past that point (as even a seeker-sensitive church recognizes). We do ourselves a disservice, then, in neglecting to accept that there is a whole other group of very talented and eloquent people blessed with knowledge and wisdom that once gleaned can enrich our lives and even help us gain a more mature faith in God. The church does not have a lock on all that is of value to learn. There is an amazing amount of beauty in this world, and there is so much truth to be learned and embraced as well. As Steven Curtis Chapman might say, "wake up and see the glory" -- don't blind yourself to something excellent simply because it lacks our "Christian" label.

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BY BRIAN SNIDER

I just read your opinion column about how Christians ought to feel free to indulge secular music and 'learn' from it. You are a very poor counselor for Christians or anyone else.

First of all, you attempt to instruct others about Christian things, but you don't believe or take heed to what the Bible says, and that is a great error. The Bible says, among other things, to have no fellowship with the unfruitful WORKS of darkness, but rather to reprove them. I would certainly say that secular music -- the great, vast majority of it -- falls into that category; it is a work of darkness. Secondly, while there may be some redeeming value in some tiny fraction of the secular music out there today, to compare the music industry to books is ludicrous. The comparison with TV is a little more accurate, but even that is not quite the same.

You see, secular rock, pop, rap, hip-hop, thrash, grunge, country -- whatever the genre -- represents far more than just music, though that would be reprehensible enough. The music is the artists, and the fashion, and the lifestyles and the philosophies. That is not true of books. Have you ever seen anyone dressing like their favorite author? No, but how many little girls have been influenced to dress like harlots by Britney Spears?

The Bible says that it is out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. And we might well say dresseth and acteth and every other thing. What is in our hearts comes out in the way we dress and live and think. The hearts of secular musicians are not the kind of influences Christians need in their lives.

Secular musicians today are the bottom rung of any moral ladder anyone could ever construct. Their lives, music, philosophies, attitudes and attire are antichrist, and the music industry is very well suited to marketing all of that in the package of music that you buy in the store. The artists are, almost to a man (or woman), immoral, God-hating reprobates who influence young children, young adults and everyone else to live life with abandon, to throw off restraint, to use drugs and liquor, to have abortions, to live in immorality, and to blaspheme. When a child buys a record by Nirvana, he is buying Kurt Cobain's hedonism, narcissism, his look, immorality, despair and suicidal tendencies.

I know this firsthand. I was raised in a Christian home, though I began to be drawn toward the occult because I was a HUGE Led Zeppelin fan and Jimmy Page loved everything satanic, even to the point of buying Aleister Crowley's old house. The music that I listened to influenced me for evil, not for good.

The fact that the secular world indulges this music is one reason the secular world is so polluted with sin and vice and rebellion against God. And now, you want Christians polluted with the same ideas and motivations. One reason you think this way is because

you listen to Christian rock. Christian rockers love secular rock and use it in their own lives. It's a daisy chain back to the devil. Rock and roll came from hell and it has left a trail of bread crumbs back to its home.

Yes, there are some good secular books that Christians can learn from. I would not mind my little girl reading a classic like Robinson Crusoe, though her time would be better spent studying the Bible. There are books which are basically innocent, which do not excite the flesh and which do not cater to man's lower nature. You could never say that of secular [pop] music. It is ALL produced by ungodly persons who hate the word of God and whose music contaminates everything in our society.

As you said, there are television shows that can have educational value, though television is fraught with far more danger, because it also brings the evil with whatever small amount of good is out there. Even the historical shows are liberally slanted these day, the geographic shows are always evolutionary, the documentaries generally present a philosophy that would not line up with Christian thinking. So even with the tiny fraction of 'good' shows, someone would have to be solidly grounded in God's word to avoid the pitfalls, and we can honestly say that there are few who are up to that task.

My final point is a practical one. Let's say that 10 percent of secular music has some redeeming value to it. (I'm placing the number extraordinarily high. It is probably not even one percent.) Is that a good use of a believer's time to forage for that tiny percentage of good in a garden of filth? Look at all the garbage they would have to digest just to get that little bit of value. No, there are far better ways for a Christian to use their time, which is precious, and their money. There are missionaries who could use that money far better than that impudent and lascivious woman, Madonna, don't you think?

Secular music is made by the world, for the world. It is going to the same place that those who indulge it are going. Please retract what you said. Repent of advising Christians to love more of the world. Your advice is contrary to the Bible.

"Love not the world, NEITHER THE THINGS THAT ARE IN THE WORLD. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the LUST of the flesh, the LUST of the eyes and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Brian Snider

<http://www.narrowgate.net/~bsnider/rock.html>

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